



## SOCIETY AND SOCIAL MEDIA: PUBLIC OPINION ON THE PHENOMENON OF USTAD SOLMED AS A SYMBOL OF “RICH AND RELIGION”

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### Abstract

This study analyzes the "Rich and Religious" image of Ustad Solmed as either a controversy or an inspiration through netizen comments on Instagram. This research reveals the dynamics of social media as a space for the production of imagery and social symbols that influence public perception. Using a qualitative approach and sentiment analysis, the study shows that netizens, as a normative majority, highlight the importance of balancing worldly affairs and the hereafter. Ustad Solmed's image is viewed negatively by netizens due to a worldly lifestyle deemed inconsistent with his status as a preacher. In the concept of social reception, acceptance or rejection of the balance between wealth and religiosity affects public perception of material and religious success. If society accepts this balance, a new symbol will emerge in religious practice, influencing religion-based economic life.

**Keywords:** Phenomenon; Rich and Religious; Comments; Netizens; Public Opinion.

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## Abstrak

Penelitian ini menganalisis citra "Rich and Religious" Ustad Solmed sebagai kontroversi atau inspirasi melalui komentar netizen di Instagram. Kajian ini mengungkap dinamika media sosial sebagai ruang produksi citra dan simbol sosial yang mempengaruhi persepsi publik. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif dan analisis sentimen, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa netizen, sebagai mayoritas normatif, menyoroti pentingnya keseimbangan antara urusan dunia dan akhirat. Citra Ustad Solmed dianggap buruk oleh netizen karena gaya hidup keduniawian yang dinilai tidak sesuai dengan statusnya sebagai pendakwah. Dalam konsep resepsi sosial, penerimaan atau penolakan terhadap keseimbangan antara kekayaan dan religiusitas memengaruhi persepsi publik mengenai kesuksesan material dan keagamaan. Jika masyarakat menerima keseimbangan ini, akan muncul simbol baru dalam praktik keagamaan yang memengaruhi kehidupan ekonomi berbasis agama.

**Kata Kunci:** Fenomena; Rich and Religious; Komentar; Netizen; Opini Publik.

## INTRODUCTION

Early marriage, often termed child marriage, is a common phenomenon in In recent years, social media has become one of the main platforms for conveying messages and obtaining information.<sup>1</sup> The phenomenon of public figures who combine the image of wealth and religiosity, as seen in Ustad Solmed, has attracted public attention.<sup>2</sup> Ustad Solmed, a religious figure known as a preacher and social media influencer, has successfully built an image as a wealthy individual while upholding religious values.<sup>3</sup> Ustad Solmed has come under the spotlight for his conspicuous lifestyle, which combines financial luxury with religious piety.<sup>4</sup> This phenomenon creates pros and cons among netizens and has become a hot topic of public debate.

Ustad Solmed, a religious leader active on social media, has successfully built an image of being both wealthy and religious. He often shares luxurious moments from his daily life, such as luxury cars, jewelry, and trips to exclusive destinations. On the other hand, Ustad Solmed is also known for his sermons filled with religious values and a strong spirit of worship.

The "Rich and Religious" phenomenon represented by Ustad Solmed raises questions and debates about the balance between material wealth and spiritual life. Some

<sup>1</sup>Augustinah, F., and Widayati. 2019. "Pemanfaatan Media Sosial sebagai Sarana Promosi (The Use of Social Media as a Promotional Tool)." *Jurnal Dialektika* 4(2): 1-20.

<sup>2</sup>Ridho, A., Saniah, M., Prayudha, J., and Warsah, I. 2023. "Manipulasi Religiusitas: Analisis Kritis terhadap Fenomena Pendistorsian Nilai-Nilai Sakral Agama di Indonesia (Religiosity Manipulation: A Critical Analysis of the Distortion of Sacred Religious Values in Indonesia)." *Journal for Islamic Studies* 6(2): 31-48. <https://doi.org/10.1051/e3sconf/202124411036.1>.

<sup>3</sup>Puspasari, D. 2024. "Disorot soal Pamer Rumah Mewah, Ustaz Solmed Jelaskan Dalilnya (Criticized for Flaunting His Luxury Home, Ustaz Solmed Explains the Religious Basis)." *Detik.com*, January 10.

<sup>4</sup>Hosseini, S. H. 2008. "Religion and Media, Religious Media, or Media Religion: Theoretical Studies." *Journal of Media and Religion* 9 7(1-2): 56-69. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348420701838350>. Hjarvard, S. 2011. "The Mediatisation of Religion: Theorising Religion, Media and Social Change." *Culture and Religion* 12 (2): 119-135. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14755610.2011.579719>.

netizens may see him as an inspirational example showing that one can achieve both worldly and spiritual success simultaneously.<sup>5</sup> However, others doubt the authenticity of Ustad Solmed's religious life, believing that his luxurious lifestyle contradicts the religious values he professes. The fundamental question that arises is to what extent Ustad Solmed's "Rich and Religious" image is reflected in public opinion, particularly through netizen comments on various social media platforms. Ustad Solmed's success in combining wealth and religiosity invites questions about the public's views and attitudes toward this phenomenon.

Public opinion manifested through comments on social media is a symptom caused by the social influence exerted through media content that is interactive, persuasive, and even contradictory. In the concept of normative social influence, conformity is driven by the desire to be liked and accompanied by the fear of rejection from a group.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it can be said that the interactive, persuasive, and contradictory nature of social media indirectly attracts others and influences viewers to respond and make certain judgments.<sup>7</sup> These responses and assessments are, of course, based on the extent to which social media content is identified and how subjective evaluations align with public approval and the recognition expected by the content creator.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, the phenomenon of Ustad Solmed, which reflects a dualism between Wealth and Religiosity, also represents how symbols of social class are displayed by a religious figure through social media. Doyle in Taruna & Sari,<sup>9</sup> describes that the social class of an individual has significant power in influencing their position within the social hierarchy. Marx, in his historical materialism concept, emphasizes that the structure of society determines the social classes of individuals within it.<sup>10</sup> In this principle, social class is not interpreted as a coincidence but as a human effort to improve circumstances.<sup>11</sup>

The representation of wealth and religiosity displayed by Ustad Solmed through social media is a means of forming a new version of social interests and social class in maintaining existence.<sup>12</sup> In the video content presented, wealth is visualized through the concept of an Islamic-modern-religious lifestyle by showcasing an Islamic atmosphere, a luxurious house, luxury cars, luxurious clothing, expensive jewelry, and his job as a halal-

<sup>5</sup>Kołodziejska, Marta, Łukasz Fajfer, Dominika H., and Kerstin Radde-Antweiler. 2023. "Religious Media Settlers in Times of Deep Mediatization." *Religion* 53(2): 199–223. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2022.2083032>.

<sup>6</sup>Choiriyati, S. 2015. "Peran Media Massa dalam Membentuk Opini Publik (The Role of Mass Media in Shaping Public Opinion)." *UML* 2(2): 21–27.

<sup>7</sup>Agesti, S. P., Anrial, A., & Cholis, N. (2022). *Etika Komunikasi Netizen Dimedia Sosial Twitter Pada Akun Twitter Ustadz Hilmi Firdausi* (Doctoral dissertation, IAIN Curup).

<sup>8</sup>Nurjaman, T., & Herlina, R. (2021). Personal branding Ustad Hanan Attaki di media sosial. *Professional: Jurnal Komunikasi dan Administrasi Publik*, 8(1), 22-29.

<sup>9</sup>Taruna, M. R. 2022. "Analisis Resepsi Kelas Sosial dalam Film 'Crazy Rich Asians' (Reception Analysis of Social Class in the Film 'Crazy Rich Asians')." *Jurnal Ilmiah Populer Komunikasi Massa* 2(2).

<sup>10</sup>Nugroho, A. C. 2021. "Teori Utama Sosiologi Komunikasi (Fungsionalisme Struktural, Teori Konflik, Interaksi Simbolik) [Main Theories of Communication Sociology: Structural Functionalism, Conflict Theory, Symbolic Interactionism]." *Majalah Semi Ilmiah Populer Komunikasi Massa* 2(2).

<sup>11</sup>Farihah, I. 2015. "Filsafat Materialisme Karl Marx (Karl Marx's Philosophy of Materialism)." *Fikrah: Jurnal Ilmu Aqidah dan Studi Keilmuan* 2(2).

<sup>12</sup>Ridho, A., Saniah, M., Prayudha, J., and Warsah, I. 2023. "Manipulasi Religiusitas: Analisis Kritis terhadap Fenomena Pendistorsian Nilai-Nilai Sakral Agama di Indonesia (Religiosity Manipulation: A Critical Analysis of the Distortion of Sacred Religious Values in Indonesia)." *Journal for Islamic Studies* 6(2): 31–48. <https://doi.org/10.1051/e3sconf/202124411036.1>.

herbal cigarette entrepreneur, which continues to spark pro and contra debates among the Muslim community, especially through social media.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, it can be said that a class conflict, as seen through netizen comments on social media, has indirectly occurred through the representation of wealth displayed by Ustad Solmed. The majority of netizens argue that this luxurious lifestyle is highly contradictory to Islamic teachings, which promote simplicity and discourage ostentation or showing off one's wealth. Furthermore, the wealth acquired in what is perceived as a relatively short period is also considered by some businesspeople to be implausible.<sup>14</sup>

Citing Hall on the concept of social reception analysis, he states that receiving the content or message from media involves aspects of discourse production, message/information delivery, and interpretation of meaning, all of which play crucial roles in creating social influence and reciprocal exchanges between individuals and groups.<sup>15</sup> Hence, it becomes intriguing to observe how diverse perspectives and values in society are reflected through an exploration of how netizens understand and assess the "Rich and Religious" phenomenon represented by Ustad Solmed in terms of the balance between wealth and spiritual life.

This study aims to analyze netizen comments as a mirror of public opinion on the "Rich and Religious" phenomenon carried by Ustad Solmed. Through content analysis and interviews, this study will explore societal thinking dynamics concerning the relationship between wealth and religiosity in everyday life. The research questions to be answered include: 1) How is Ustad Solmed's "Rich and Religious" image reflected in netizen comments on social media? and 2) Do people view this phenomenon as a form of inspiration or controversy? The analysis of netizen comments through these research questions will provide an overview of how public views, judgments, and social influences are shaped through social media concerning the religiosity and wealth concept presented by Ustad Solmed as a religious figure. His preaching may be one of the main attractions, but it must also be examined whether this serves as a balance to the luxurious image he displays, or whether it is part of an image-building strategy. Other factors that may serve as balancing elements include his involvement in social activities, consistency in delivering substantive religious messages, and direct responses to relevant issues within the Muslim community.<sup>16</sup>

By understanding the dynamics of public opinion through netizen comments, this study is expected to provide deeper insights into the role of religious figures in the realm of social media and understand its impact on the public's understanding of the values of wealth and religiosity. In addition, this study can also contribute to the literature on the relationship between wealth and spirituality in the digital era.

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<sup>13</sup>Annas, F. B., Petranto, H. N., & Pramayoga, A. A. (2019). Opini publik dalam polarisasi politik di media sosial public opinion of political polarization on social media. *Jurnal PIKOM (Penelitian Komunikasi Dan Pembangunan)*, 20(2), 111.

<sup>14</sup>Meilia, S. A., Ardana, A. F., Razzaq, A., & Nugraha, M. Y. (2024). Dakwah Ustadz Abdul Somad pada media sosial TikTok: Upaya menjaga adab dalam berkomunikasi. *Komunika: Jurnal Ilmiah Komunikasi*, 2(2), 9-17.

<sup>15</sup>Hall, S. 1977. *The Work of Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage Publications.

<sup>16</sup>Suryawati, I., & Rusadi, U. (2021). Etnografi Virtual Komodifikasi Da'Wah Ustadz Di Channel Youtube. *Perspektif Komunikasi: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi Politik dan Komunikasi Bisnis*, 5(2), 111-128.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Social Influence Theory

In the context of Social Influence Theory, analyzing netizens' comments can provide a deeper understanding of how public perceptions and attitudes toward Ustad Solmed are shaped by their interactions with others on social media. This theory highlights several key concepts:<sup>17</sup>

- 1) Conformity: This concept suggests that individuals tend to adjust their behavior, attitudes, and opinions to align with the norms of their social group. In analyzing netizens' comments, we can observe whether there is pressure to agree with or reject the "Rich and Religious" image portrayed by Ustad Solmed, and how this conformity is reflected in their comments.
- 2) Majority and Minority Influence: This concept asserts that both majority and minority groups within a society can influence individual attitudes and opinions. In Ustad Solmed's context, an analysis of netizen comments can identify whether majority or minority groups are influencing public opinion about him and how this influence is reflected in the comments.
- 3) Normative and Informational Influence: This concept distinguishes between social influences driven by the need for social approval (normative) and those driven by the need to obtain accurate information (informational). In the analysis of netizen comments, we can examine whether the comments are more influenced by the desire to be accepted by others or by the pursuit of accurate information about Ustad Solmed.
- 4) Communicator Influence: This theory also emphasizes that social influence depends on the characteristics of the communicator or message sender. In this case, analyzing netizen comments can provide insights into how public perceptions and attitudes toward Ustad Solmed are influenced by his characteristics as a public figure, preacher, and social media influencer.

Based on the application of these concepts in analyzing netizen comments, we can gain a better understanding of how social media interactions influence public perceptions and attitudes toward Ustad Solmed and the "Rich and Religious" image he embodies.

### B. Social Reception

Social reception analysis refers to a comparative method between the textual analysis of media discourse and audience discourse, with interpretation outcomes referring to contextual factors such as cultural settings and the context of other media content. Here, the audience is viewed as part of an interpretive community that is actively engaged in interpreting and producing meaning—not merely as passive individuals who simply absorb media content.<sup>18</sup>

According to Hall, the meanings presented in media content represent sequences of social events containing embedded ideologies. This process occurs through three stages: encoding, decoding, and interpretation—each essential for analyzing audience reactions. Encoding is defined as the process of analyzing socio-political contexts during content

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<sup>17</sup>Ginting, S. Y. 2023. "Teori-teori Psikologi Sosial dalam Konteks Perilaku Manusia (Theories of Social Psychology in the Context of Human Behavior)." *Literacy Notes* 1(1): 1–10.

<sup>18</sup>Hall, S. 1977. *The Work of Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage Publications.

production, while decoding refers to the process of media content consumption. Hall emphasizes that individuals may experience contradictions when interpreting messages. Message reception will not occur if the individual lacks the capacity to decode the message.

In simpler terms, Bankovic in Afifah explains that encoding is the process in which the communicator organizes a message using the most effective code before delivering it to the receiver.<sup>19</sup> Decoding, on the other hand, is the process through which the receiver attempts to reconstruct and interpret the codes sent by the communicator. During message reception, discrepancies may arise due to differences in how senders and receivers interpret messages, leading to distortions in meaning.

The "Rich and Religious" phenomenon of Ustad Solmed, theoretically, gains meaning during reception—when social media videos are viewed, watched, and listened to. In other words, the audience (netizens) are seen as meaning producers, not just consumers of media content. Netizens interpret audiovisual texts on social media based on their cultural background and subjective life experiences. Therefore, a single video may generate various meanings even within the same context. Every media text inherently contains ideology, which highlights the importance of reception analysis in studying content that conveys specific information. In this research, the theoretical model of social reception demonstrates how audiences interpret the messages conveyed through Ustad Solmed's videos, which portray his wealth alongside his religiosity on social media platforms.

### C. Public Opinion

Public opinion refers to the views, attitudes, and beliefs held by the majority of individuals in society regarding a specific issue, event, or public figure. Public opinion is reflected through various communication channels such as mass media, social media, public polls, and discussion forums. It plays a significant role in democratic societies as it can influence public policy, elections, and social dynamics.<sup>20</sup> Public opinion is diverse and varies based on social, cultural, economic, and political backgrounds.<sup>21</sup> It is also shaped by the information individuals receive and their interactions within social groups.<sup>22</sup>

In the context of analyzing netizen comments on the phenomenon of "Ustad Solmed: Rich and Religious?", public opinion can be observed through the comments made by social media users. These comments offer insight into how the public responds to the "Rich and Religious" image embodied by Ustad Solmed—whether with approval, criticism, or controversy. Understanding public opinion allows for a deeper understanding of how this phenomenon is perceived and interpreted by society at large.

### D. Rich and Religious

"Rich and Religious" refers to individuals who possess material wealth while sincerely practicing their faith. This concept combines two dimensions often perceived as

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<sup>19</sup>Afifah, N. Z. 2019. "Encoding-Decoding Khalayak tentang Kekerasan Verbal dalam Video Gaming Reza 'Arap' Oktovian (Audience Encoding-Decoding on Verbal Violence in Reza 'Arap' Oktovian's Video Gaming Content)." *Lektur Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi* 2(2).

<sup>20</sup>Choiriyati, S. 2015. "Peran Media Massa dalam Membentuk Opini Publik (The Role of Mass Media in Shaping Public Opinion)." *UML* 2(2): 21–27.

<sup>21</sup>Baidhawry, Z. 2005. *Pendidikan Agama Berwawasan Multikultural (Multicultural-Oriented Religious Education)*. Jakarta: Erlangga.

<sup>22</sup>Juditha, C. 2018. "Interaksi Komunikasi Hoax di Media Sosial serta Antisipasinya (Hoax Communication Interaction in Social Media and Its Anticipation)." *Jurnal Pekommas* 3(1): 31–44.

contradictory: wealth and spirituality. The "Rich and Religious" phenomenon has gained attention in recent years with the emergence of public figures, such as social media influencers or religious leaders, who are materially successful yet remain active in religious practices.<sup>23</sup> These individuals often integrate images of wealth, glamorous lifestyles, and luxury consumption with spiritual or religious messages.

This phenomenon raises questions and discussions about how wealth and spirituality can coexist—whether wealth obstructs or supports one's religious practices, and how the "Rich and Religious" image influences societal views on spirituality and materialism. It also creates polarization within society, with some seeing it as a symbol of success and inspiration, while others perceive it as insincere or hypocritical religious practice.<sup>24</sup> Analyzing the "Rich and Religious" phenomenon enables a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between wealth and spirituality in modern contexts.

## METHOD

Sentiment analysis is a powerful method for understanding public attitudes and perceptions toward a particular topic, figure, or phenomenon. In this case, Ustad Solmed and the "Rich and Religious" image he presents. The sentiment analysis process includes several steps, namely:<sup>25</sup>

1. Data Collection: The first step in sentiment analysis is gathering data—in this case, comments related to Ustad Solmed from various social media platforms such as Instagram. The data is collected from the years 2021 to 2024.
2. Data Preprocessing: The collected data then undergoes preprocessing, including tasks such as removing punctuation, tokenization, and cleaning irrelevant or non-essential words.
3. Sentiment Algorithm Application: After preprocessing, the data is analyzed using sentiment analysis algorithms and natural language processing techniques designed to classify sentiments. These algorithms identify whether each comment is positive, negative, or neutral.
4. Result Analysis: The results of sentiment analysis provide an overview of the sentiment distribution within the netizen comments. Researchers can identify overall trends, patterns, and variations in public attitudes and perceptions toward Ustad Solmed and the "Rich and Religious" phenomenon.
5. Interpretation: Researchers can gain a methodical understanding of public views and perceptions by interpreting the sentiment analysis data. Researchers can determine how the public reacts to Ustad Solmed and the image he promotes by looking at whether the sentiments are primarily positive, negative, or neutral.

Through sentiment analysis, researchers can uncover trends, patterns, and differences in how society views Ustad Solmed. This can offer valuable insights into how the phenomenon is understood and perceived by the broader public.

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<sup>23</sup>Fauzi, M. 2023. *Muslimah Bukan Agen Moral (Muslim Women Are Not Moral Agents)*. Yogyakarta: Bentang Pustaka.

<sup>24</sup>Hayat, N. 2022. "Religion Identity and Political Polarization: How Does Labeling Make It Worst?" *Polita: Journal of Social Religion Research* 7(1): 51–65.

<sup>25</sup>Mailo, F. F., and Lazuardi, L. 2019. "Analisis Sentimen Data Twitter Menggunakan Metode Text Mining Tentang Masalah Obesitas di Indonesia (Twitter Sentiment Analysis Using Text Mining on Obesity Issues in Indonesia)." *Journal of Information Systems for Public Health* 4(1).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### A. The Image of "Rich and Religious" in Ustad Solmed Through Netizens' Comments on Social Media

Several Instagram posts by Ustad Solmed have generated various responses from netizens, especially in relation to the luxurious lifestyle he displays on social media.



Figure 1. Dynamics of Netizens' Comments on Ustad Solmed's Instagram.

One example includes a post featuring a luxury vehicle, the Defender. Comments on this post reflect skepticism and criticism: @Sobat\_122789 remarked, "Drop the 'ustad' title, just use Solmed—it tarnishes the image of a cleric." @Kireyna\_yumna responded, "He actually earns money because of that label." Another user, @bowolintangpanjersore, stated, "He is possibly being tested by Allah with wealth for exploiting religion—we'll see how he ends up."

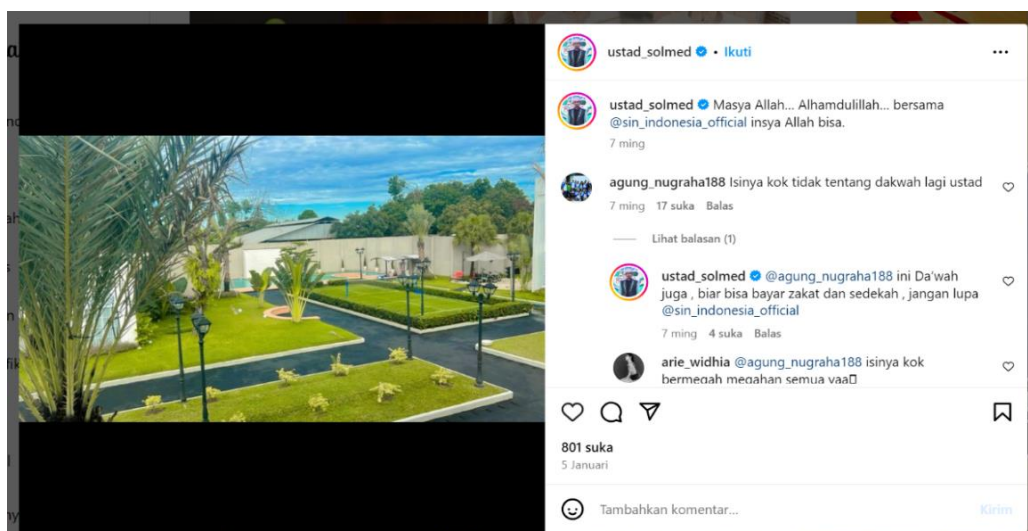


Figure 2. Public Reactions to Ustad Solmed's Home Post.



Another post shows a photo of his luxurious home, prompting reactions such as @agung\_nugraha188's, "Why is it no longer about preaching?" and @arie\_widhia's, "It's all about showing off wealth now."



Figure 3. Responses to Ustad Solmed's Luxury Three-Wheeler.

In a different post, Ustad Solmed was seen with his wife on a luxury three-wheeled vehicle. Comments like @rizalbadila's reflect disapproval: "Weren't you crying on TV about bankruptcy during the pandemic? Now it's all about flaunting again." Another comment by @its\_zains asked, "Dear Ustad, what is the ruling on riya (showing off) in Islam? Did the Prophet ever teach us to do so?"

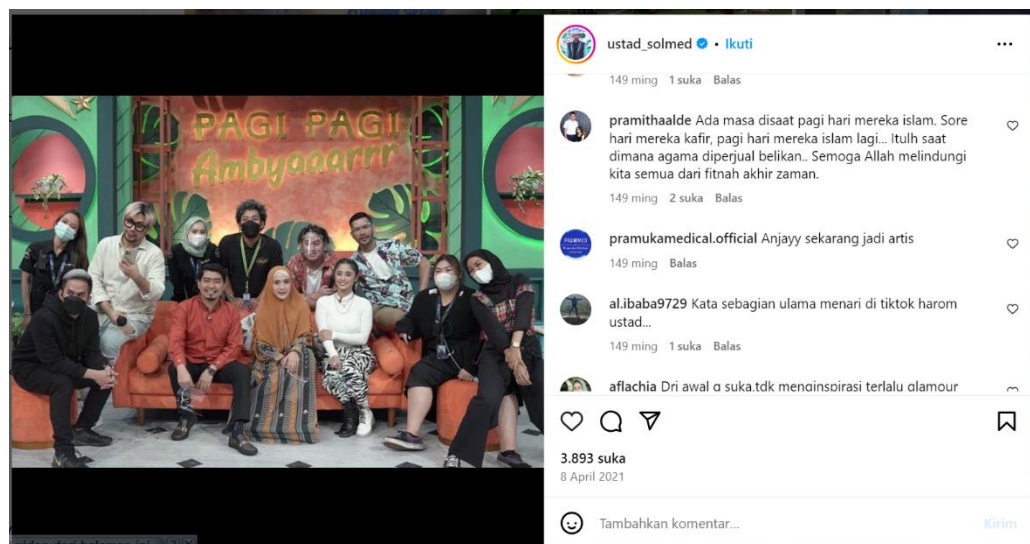


Figure 4. Reactions to Ustad Solmed's Interaction with Celebrities.

In another post featuring celebrities, netizens reacted with criticisms tied to religiosity and identity. For instance, @pramithaalde commented, "There will come a time when people become disbelievers in the evening and Muslims again in the morning—religion is being commercialized." Other critical comments include: @pramukamedical.official: "Now

you're an artist?" and @al.ibaba9729: "Some scholars say dancing on TikTok is haram, Ustad."

From the analysis of these four snapshots, it is evident that public perception of Ustad Solmed reflects a complex tension between material wealth and religious identity. Social expectations about the ideal behavior of religious figures continue to evolve. While some may see wealth as a blessing when obtained through halal means, others question its compatibility with spiritual modesty.

From the lens of social influence theory, netizens—especially the majority voices—act as agents of social norm enforcement. The comments on Ustad Solmed's posts reflect a normative pressure for religious figures to embody humility and prioritize spiritual over material success.

On the other hand, within the framework of conformity, Ustad Solmed's dual image as materially successful and religiously active may represent a new archetype of religious public figures in a modern context. He may be seen as inspirational to some, embodying the possibility of worldly and spiritual success coexisting. The public's reception of this image—whether supportive or critical—offers insights into changing cultural narratives about prosperity and piety.

Reception theory helps to understand this dynamic. If the public accepts the coexistence of wealth and religiosity, this may signal a more holistic interpretation of success. Conversely, rejection of such figures indicates a cultural tension that ties religious morality to asceticism and non-materialistic values.

### B. "Rich and Religious" Ustad Solmed: Inspiration or Controversy?

Examining Ustad Solmed's "Rich and Religious" persona requires a multidimensional approach, as it lies at the intersection of moral, spiritual, and material narratives in society.



**Figure 5.** Inspirational Comments on Ustad Solmed's Posts.

Some netizens express admiration: @khotibulfajarimani commented, "Amazing and real talk, Ustad." @asthieard added, "Hard work never betrays results—blessings!"

@dina.fitria1506 shared, “Watched the YouTube episode—so much inspiration and wisdom from Ustad Solmed and April Jasmine. Hope to be successful like them. Aamiin.”

However, contrasting comments signal discontent: @imamahmadrifai commented, “Easy to get rich nowadays by being a preacher.” @siappakaijual wrote, “A worldly Ustad.” Another, @mayawidjaksana, noted, “His wife looked uneasy and anxious during the conversation with Atta—her expressions were revealing.”



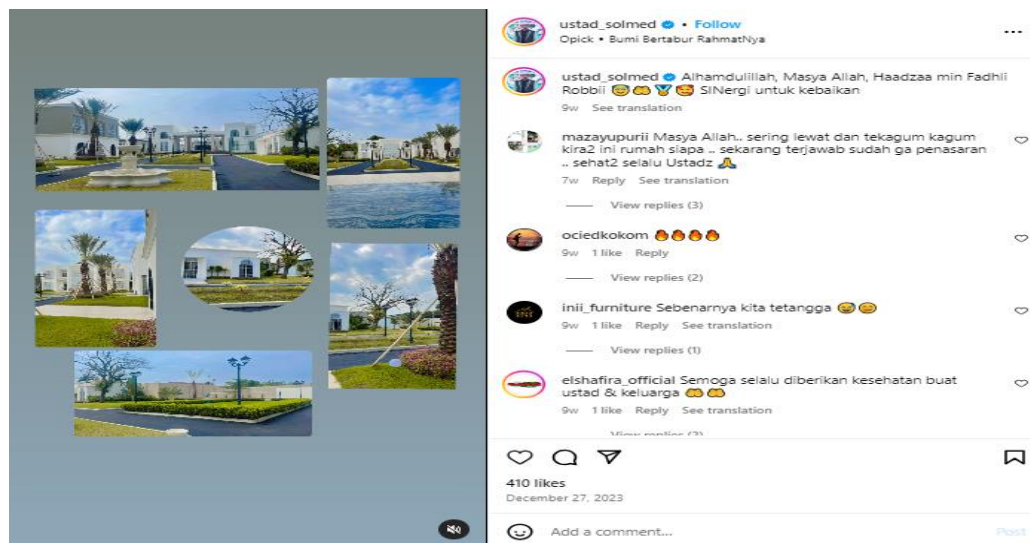
Figure 6. Mixed Responses to Ustad Solmed's Luxury.

In several posts, some comments perceive Ustad Solmed's actions as inspirational. For example, user @nartiaja235 wrote, “Pak Ustad has always been humble and friendly... even with a luxurious house, he remains welcoming and kind. Wishing you happiness and good health always, Ustad. We miss your sermons.” Similarly, user @soganbatikmadura commented, “MasyaAllah, I really want to be like Ustad.” Another user, @italestari951, wrote, “Masya Allah, may success continue for you, Ustad. Stay healthy. I wish to be guided by you to face life's challenges.”

However, there are also controversial comments criticizing Ustad Solmed's public display of wealth. User @ammaria1212 stated, “There are many people richer than you, but they don't brag. Your speech sounds arrogant. Islam teaches simplicity, yet this Ustad promotes arrogance and flaunts wealth.” User @ar.an1009 commented, “Riya (showing off); it would be more blessed if you built a pesantren instead.” Likewise, @luthfi.muntashir wrote, “Claims to be an Ustad, but loves showing off (riya)?”—just a few among many critical comments.

Additional insights can be drawn from other posts as follows:





**Figure 7.** Dynamics of Netizen Comments on Ustad Solmed's Social Media.

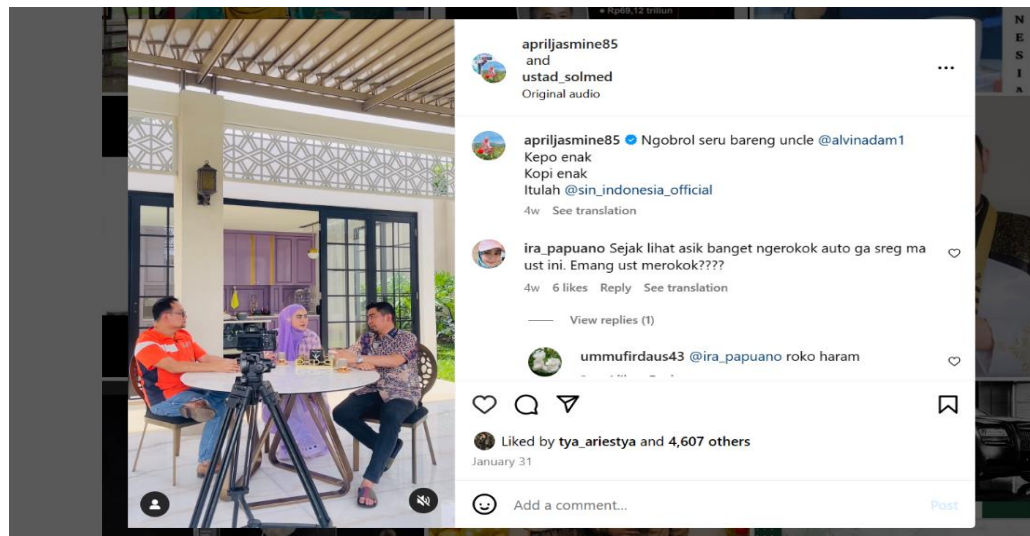
Some netizens continued to express admiration, such as @mazayupurii who said, “Masya Allah.. I often passed by and was amazed, wondering whose house it was. Now the mystery is solved. Stay healthy, Ustad.” Another user, @nurulasyifazain, commented, “MasyaAllah, such a beautiful house, Ustad. I hope to be blessed with wealth like yours so I can make my parents happy... Aamiin.”

In contrast, @alfahby criticized the post, saying, “Many people are struggling... The Prophet was offered wealth but rejected worldly riches. Yet here’s an Ustad flaunting his fortune.” This comment reflects the controversy surrounding Ustad Solmed's post.



**Figure 8.** Dynamics of Netizen Comments on Ustad Solmed's Social Media.

Other inspirational comments include user @limabelasnolsatu saying, “Growing old together... eyyyaaa...” and @rantsusanti who wrote, “When can I visit your palace, Madam Haji? It must be so cozy I wouldn't want to leave.” In contrast, @ranti6776 simply commented, “The further we go, the more out of touch it feels.”



**Figure 9.** Dynamics of Netizen Comments on Ustad Solmed's Social Media.

This post also drew a variety of reactions. For instance, @zidna\_tsuoyya stated, "What makes it look grand is the massive garden. The house itself isn't bigger than other celebrities'. Maybe this is the result of the patience shown by Ustad Solmed and his wife. Think positively, friends. InshaAllah it's all halal." Another user, @ahmad\_must90, said, "Stay healthy, Ustad. My sister-in-law is also a SIN cigarette stockist and can now support two families." User @muntazah55 added, "MasyaAllah, seeing someone happy and enjoying the fruits of their hard work makes me happy too. Hard work never betrays the result." Similarly, @aihenimudiawati said, "MasyaAllah, may your sustenance keep flowing and reach my family too. I hope there's a job opening at your company for my child."

In contrast, critics were vocal as well. For instance, @faridafarida1112 wrote, "Arrogant and boastful." Another, @qemal55batizta, suggested, "Please remove the 'Ustad' label." While @ari.koinangin said, "Such a tacky Ustad. Show-off," and @faridariany06 added, "I've never liked this couple."

While there is some public acceptance of the balance portrayed by Ustad Solmed between wealth and religious engagement, criticisms also persist. These criticisms often raise concerns about the motives behind material success and its alignment with religious values. If the majority of netizens accept the balance exemplified by Ustad Solmed, this may indicate an inclusive societal view on success—suggesting that material success is not necessarily incompatible with spiritual piety. It would reflect a broader and more flexible interpretation of success and religiosity.

On the other hand, if most netizens reject such a balance, it may reflect discomfort or disapproval of combining wealth with religious symbolism. Such rejection may stem from more traditional or conservative views that prioritize spiritual purity over material prosperity.

Thus, whether accepted or rejected, the portrayal of a "rich and religious" figure like Ustad Solmed may influence public perceptions about the relationship between material success and religiosity, shaping broader societal ideals about what constitutes genuine success and spiritual integrity.

Criticism of materialism and spirituality—particularly in the context of the "Rich and Religious" phenomenon as represented by figures such as Ustad Solmed—encompasses a variety of perspectives that reflect the tension between worldly values and religious

principles. Through the analysis of netizen comments as a reflection of public opinion, several recurring forms of criticism can be identified:

- 1) Loss of Spiritual Values: this criticism highlights how the pursuit of material wealth can distract individuals from their spiritual and religious commitments. Some netizens argue that an excessive focus on wealth may lead to the neglect of religious obligations and core spiritual values.
- 2) Social Inequality: another criticism targets the accumulation of wealth by certain individuals, which is perceived to widen the gap between social classes. This contributes to negative perceptions of affluent individuals who are seen as contributing little to the well-being of the broader society.

Beyond these, Concerns over Greed also emerge, with some netizens associating materialism with greed. The relentless desire to accumulate wealth is viewed by many as unethical and contrary to religious teachings on modesty and contentment. Criticism of Spirituality also manifests in various ways. One major point is Hypocrisy, where individuals who portray themselves as religious are accused of engaging in materialistic practices. Netizens may point out inconsistencies between the religious messages conveyed by such figures and the lavish lifestyles they appear to lead.

Religious Exploitation is another concern, referring to the perceived misuse of religious identity or knowledge for personal financial gain. This includes criticism of individuals or institutions who use their religious status to accumulate wealth—an act that some netizens regard as manipulation of others' faith and trust. Furthermore, Polarization and Exclusivity may arise from certain expressions of spirituality. Critics argue that these practices can marginalize those who do not conform to the same materialistic or spiritual standards, creating divisions within society. In the context of the "Rich and Religious" phenomenon, both critiques of materialism and spirituality reflect the diverse and complex views held within society. These criticisms not only reveal internal debates about the value of wealth versus spiritual piety but also expose the broader societal challenge of reconciling the two. Responses to such criticism can vary greatly depending on the social, cultural, and religious context of individuals or groups involved in the discourse.

## CONCLUSION

This study was motivated by concerns over the emergence of the "rich and religious" image embodied by religious public figures such as Ustaz Solmed on social media. The central concern lies in the potential shift in the meaning of religiosity caused by the blending of symbols of wealth with religious attributes, which may lead to biased public perceptions regarding the nature of piety and success.

An analysis of netizen comments—as a representation of the majority voice on social media—reveals a wide range of public responses. However, a common thread among them is the emphasis on maintaining a balance between worldly affairs and spiritual obligations in daily life. Material success is generally deemed acceptable, provided it does not compromise religious and moral values. The acceptance of religious figures who display luxury can be interpreted as an indication of shifting values within contemporary Muslim society. This reflects an evolution toward a more flexible and contextual religious thought, while opening space for reflective dialogue on how spirituality and material success can be constructed in tandem in modern life.

From the perspective of reception theory, public acceptance or rejection of Ustadz Solmed's religious image is not merely a matter of personal taste or preference, but part of a collective meaning-making process concerning new symbols in religious expression. If the balance between religiosity and wealth continues to gain social legitimacy, it may give rise to new cultural codes or symbols in religious practice that influence the socio-economic structure of the Muslim community.

Based on these findings, several recommendations can be proposed: 1) There is a need for digital religious literacy initiatives to encourage the public to engage critically with the representations of religious figures on social media, to avoid being misled by mere symbolism. 2) Ethical guidelines for religious preaching on social media should be developed, emphasizing simplicity, honesty, and social responsibility for celebrity preachers and public religious figures. 3) Religious institutions and Islamic educational bodies should respond to this phenomenon by crafting adaptive religious narratives that remain rooted in spiritual values, in order to promote a balanced understanding of the worldly and the spiritual. 4) Further research is needed to explore in greater depth how society interprets the interplay between capital, religious symbols, and religious authority in the digital age.

Thus, this study not only addresses concerns regarding potential biases in modern representations of religiosity, but also contributes to the development of a more contextual, critical, and socially relevant religious discourse.

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